



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

say nothing of other expenses involved.

So with the preparation of other books, that form the second subject of our discussion. It is impossible, I think, to expect a publisher whose business existence depends upon making money, to undertake the publication of books having a circulation, restricted at best and that must necessarily be dwindling, as we have seen—with the certainty of making no profit, and with the possibility of large loss.

Now, our Immigrant Publication Society is intensely interested in this matter. We have the experience, and we have the co-operation of the most competent helpers. We have the sympathy and the enthusiastic interest of our foreign-born—a unique thing—who delight in the democratic ideas that we have been trying to stand for. The work is not endowed; it is not a commercial venture, but it must pay its expenses in the large and more ambitious field on which we are now entering. The question is how we can make these needed books pay for their cost, and that is placed before you librarians with the hope that through you in part the affair may be managed, if we can continue successfully to meet your needs. The first suggestion I take the liberty of making, in reply to your President's question, is the wider trial and the use of the books that we have already published, and that have been fully and satisfactorily proved by library use.

I have been talking this matter over

with some of our friends here, and they have suggested this plan: We propose soon to send to each member of the Association, who is conceivably interested in this work with foreigners, a letter stating the titles of books that are very much needed, among others, the History of the United States in Italian and Polish that Miss Campbell has just spoken of. And there are other books in constant library demand, the Yiddish and other foreign lists, our Immigrants' Guide in other languages, our "Makers of America" in Italian and Yiddish, the Guide to Citizenship, now nearly ready, a simple book on agriculture, one on hygiene.

We are going to prepare a list of such books, a few of them already well advanced for publication, and we are going to ask you: "If we publish these books, how many will you agree to take?" Some of them you are already familiar with, because it is only a question of translations. For others you may wish to place merely a trial order. All will be very modestly priced. Then when we receive your replies, we shall proceed as rapidly as possible, first with those for which we find the expense most nearly guaranteed. Also through this means, with the successful advance of the work, I hope we shall be able to develop an efficient bureau of advice. We are always willing to give advice and help, within the limits of our power. We shall be glad to hear from you at any time on any subject relating to this work.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AS SEEN FROM THE CIRCULATION DESK

A SYMPOSIUM

I.

This is the first time that I have attempted to record, even for my own use, a statement regarding my personal feelings toward the American public. It is one which is ever present, but to discuss it, even among one's friends, seems almost equivalent to betraying a confidence, and perhaps would be considered so by most of us, if

any attempt were made to cite special cases. I feel quite sure that in the discussion this evening, the American public will be considered in its entirety and we shall thus escape being accused of disloyalty to our readers. I believe that those who are to follow me on the program would have preferred the subject reversed, and it is possible that some of the speakers will ap-

proach it from the other side, for certainly we all frequently question ourselves regarding the public's view of us, particularly when our sins of omission and commission are so many that we sometimes wish to hide our heads in shame.

The acceptance of a library position indicates a willingness to become a public servant, and we may excuse our presumption in discussing our employer, the public, on the ground that every servant, no matter how conscientious and loyal, at some time places his employer before him and attempts an analysis of his chief characteristics, so perhaps it is not altogether out of place for us to take this position.

The American public, as viewed from the circulation desk, should not be limited to library readers, but should include all of those who have the right to use the library, for the library employee must be able to see far beyond the walls of the library building, out to the very limits of the district which the library is to serve, for the comparatively limited group which uses the library must not be allowed to represent to us the entire American public. Naturally the attitude of mind of the employee at the circulation desk is much influenced by those who decide the library's policy and if the management has not the broad general outlook, the employee will be lacking in this particular. It rests with those at the top to have a well defined belief that the library exists for all the people, not alone for the mere handful, which happen to use it.

As we look out from our libraries upon the groups of people in which we are so much interested, have we not all felt at times, that the task of making the library effectively known to the entire community is almost more than we dare undertake? We wonder by what means we can make these people believe in our honesty and in our sincerity and also, that having accepted the position and the responsibility we will try to use their money to their best advantage. It is not often that a library serves directly more than thirty per cent of the people and, counting the indirect service which it is so very hard to esti-

mate, not more than fifty per cent. The honest and sincere library worker believes that this condition is due for some reason to some fault of hers and if she has any of the spirit of the social worker, she longs to bring about a decided increase.

Much, perhaps too much, has been said about conducting our libraries on business principles. Businesslike methods must be adopted, without question, but this should not mean that we must look upon our readers and possible readers, with the same attitude of mind and the same commercial spirit as that shown by the merchant toward his customers. As soon as the commercial element enters into our work, we are in danger of losing that sympathy for our public which our interest in the public has created, but which competition will soon destroy. A comparison of figures of circulation with other libraries, and an effort to learn the reason for increase or decrease of library use is always commendable, but as soon as we begin to look too eagerly for numbers in circulation, we are becoming too commercial, or we are being overly zealous for figures by means of which we may acquire a good standing in the library world. I would rather bring about a condition which would prompt every person of the community to use the library once each year, than to prompt what might appear to be a much greater use, if the latter would mean service to only a part of the population: for in so doing, I should feel sure that the earnest effort to give good service at the circulation desk by extending sympathy and help to all was receiving the response and co-operation of the public. Generally speaking, the public is not indifferent to the value of its public institutions. It simply needs to be kept informed of the existence of these institutions. We must always keep in mind the fact that we have no compulsory library law corresponding to our public school law. If we had, possibly our libraries would seem to be as important in the eyes of all the people as are our schools. We must depend upon holding the public's interest principally by giving freely of ourselves to

our work and by recognizing the public's due.

In our western cities the public libraries are used more generally by all classes of people than I believe is the case in eastern cities. This is due, no doubt, to the existence in the older cities of many association and semi-private libraries. This naturally prompts a different outlook by the library upon the public. You of the eastern cities may not be much concerned if the people of some particular district do not use your library, because you believe they may have access to some other library, but we of the west know that generally it is a choice between the purchase of books and the use of the public library and knowing something of the financial standing of our people, as we generally do, we know whether or not they can afford to purchase many books, and from this we know fairly well who are readers and who are not. These facts often govern in the work of library extension.

I am quite conscious that the personal work which we do is the most valuable to both doer and recipient. Our work would not seem worth the doing if at the close of a hard busy day, we could not look back over the past few hours and recall those cases where much service has been needed and which has been greatly appreciated where received. Sometimes at the close of a period of concentrated effort and hard work, we may ask ourselves if it is all worth while, if there is any reason for its being done, for sometimes the indifference of the public is deadly. When we are able to look on the brighter side of things we recall not only the service given to the student and to the scholar, but also the fact that real joy has been taken into many homes, into homes where the chief pleasure is that derived from the use of library books. It would be foolish and sentimental to go into details of this character of the work, but we may as well admit to ourselves that the personal work which we do gives us the keenest pleasure of all, because it is the most human. We are conscious that we are acting as the medium by which the thing which we believe is of vital import-

ance to the people is being conveyed to them and which without our assistance might not reach them, and this belief naturally produces a feeling of real joy in the work that we are doing.

It is a noticeable fact that the employee in the library who occupies some other position than that of serving the public from the delivery desk, generally considers that she is holding a higher position than what is generally termed "desk assistant," but what position in the library can possibly be of more importance than the one which brings us in direct contact with the public? Her position is equivalent to that of the teacher who comes in direct contact with the pupils and should be considered of the first importance. Who can possibly wish to exchange the position which gives breadth of view and largeness of outlook, which prompts an open mind and brings one in contact with the world at large, for one which may limit its horizon to the interior of the library building? It is only when we place at the circulation desk our best library assistants, those employees who can look upon the public in a generous, sympathetic way that we shall reach the best results from our labors.

Naturally, no two of us will look upon this question of the American public in quite the same way. To some, it is the exceptional reader who makes the strongest appeal, to others the children, still to others the person who is down and out and to many, perhaps the majority, the great middle class will be looked upon as being the strongest friend and advocate of our free public libraries. I am sure we shall each have our favorite type, but this feeling of favoritism will be carefully concealed in the circulation department which wishes to make a success of its work.

We must remember as we look upon the American public from the circulation desk, that the term "The Public" means all of the people, that every possible human characteristic enters into the make-up of the public, that the library is their institution, not ours, and that we are placed in our various positions for the purpose of convey-

ing to them in the simplest manner and according to the rules which they may approve the material contained in the library. It is the public's privilege to judge of the work of the library employee and the duty of the library employee to profit by such criticism if it be just, and always to see in her field of labor an opportunity for greater service.

EDITH TOBITT,
Omaha Public Library.

II.

Few of those who come to this country looking for copy report shyness as an American characteristic. Yet diffidence is evident when the average citizen enters a library. It is surprising to see how much awe can be inspired by a very young assistant who does not know much and is aware of it, but who happens to be sitting behind a desk against a background of books. The result of this diffidence is a tendency to ask for what is wanted, in the most general terms—"a book on agriculture" when all the man really wants is to raise cucumbers in his back yard.

Part of this vagueness is due to a hope of obtaining information without exposing his own lack of knowledge though it might uncover only what someone has aptly called one of "the honorable points of ignorance;" and part to the inability of the majority of people to phrase their meaning exactly.

Men who need technical books are used to doing things, and they know precisely what they want, but their range of expression is often limited. Others know their subject in a general way, but cannot put it into words. Some day we may take a hint from the salesmanship schools and have practice classes for our staff in the science of questioning and the art of finding out by suggestion. For a textbook we can use some librarian's pamphlet on "Successful questions I have asked."

An unexpected trait is encountered when we ask for a borrower's signature before he uses certain books. People do not like to trust you with their names! It is more

than the reserve of modern life, it is something more elemental, a queer and atavistic kink that makes us kin to Rumpelstiltskin. I have felt so often that it harked back to the old folk ways superstition. If you get possession of another man's name, or anything that is a part of him, even one hair from his head, you have him in your power.

It is not for malignant power but for purposes of identification that we prefer to have a borrower's full name as part of our library records. Our success is largely a question of locality. In the east the middle name is usually a matter of family pride and used very freely, while farther west the name seems to be regarded as a mere tag, and shortened for convenience, with even a vigorously expressed distaste for using more than the two initials.

There is a part of the public as seen from the circulation desk, which—to put it Irishly—we never see at all.

"Please give me a book for my mother." "My grandmother wants another story." I have in my mental picture gallery a whole row of nice grandmothers still reading Marlitt and Rosa Carey; but you cannot be sure that somebody's grandmother will not return "Gold Elsie" and demand instead "The great adventure."

That is the difficulty in indirect work of this kind. Finding the right books for someone you have never seen is as elusive a task as matching a piece of red calico. A method of solution, however, can be found for every problem, and the approved first aid in these emergencies is "What book had you before that your mother liked?"

I still remember my own initial experience. A small girl asked me for a book to take home to her mother. I applied the formula—her mother liked Thackeray. In less than ten minutes another little girl came in. With "Henry Esmond" and "Vanity Fair" in mind, I did, however, stop long enough to say again, "And what has your mother had before that she liked?" "Please, teacher," the little girl said, "she likes the Blue fairy book pretty well."

By such means we choose the books and

the children take them home to fathers and mothers, big brothers, Catholic Sisters in the parochial schools, and often to "neighbor ladies," sometimes at as much as a penny apiece.

For sisters the formula is, "Is your sister in high school?" not "How old is she?" for she is always "twenty," old enough, that is, so that you will let her have a love story.

The children develop an amazing keenness in selecting and remembering books. If you have given them a love story they look at the frontispiece. If they have not seen it before, but if he and she are both pictured there, in colors, and close enough together to indicate a happy ending, they know Big Sister will be satisfied.

In foreign districts much of the adult work is done through the children. It is necessary to win their confidence first and then find out what they want.

Foreign juvenile books we send to the grandmother; fairy tales frequently, to the mother; fiction and travel, to the father. Some of the fathers will come to the library, but history and tradition are against the mothers. Often, when asked to come and take out a card, they say, "I'll have to ask my man." Cook books and crochet books are often a successful bait, and apparently "my man" approves reading with so practical an object in immediate view.

Fortunately no fixed questions or formulas, however skillful, can cover all cases, and every day at the circulation desk brings some new situation to meet and some new opportunity for service.

LOUISE PROUTY,
Cleveland Public Library.

III.

The desk assistant might divide the American public into three classes. First, those who disconcert her by their reverential awe; second, those who embarrass her by a surprising irreverence; third, those, who reassure her by intelligent appreciation.

She cannot judge them without realizing

to what extent the library is responsible for their attitude. If, for instance, librarians had not at one time sanctioned the belief that the library was a retreat for scholars only and the librarian a law unto himself, we would never have inherited the "reverential" class. If the public library had achieved a wider publicity, we would no longer be approached with a deference which we do our utmost to discourage. Neither would the public find it necessary to resort to an air of bravado, evidently intended to conceal an uncomfortable strangeness in the presence of books. Everyone would feel as much at home as does that intelligent reader who is alive to the inherent democracy of the library and to the librarian's desire that it shall be put to test.

While the desk assistant can never attempt to shoulder responsibility for all of the public's foibles and failings, (alas, she is altogether too conscious of her own shortcomings!) she can at least "give the devil his due" and see to it that the discussion is not entirely one-sided.

If the librarian has many new standards to uphold, she has also many traditions to live down. She must direct the scores of borrowers who come with ready-made ideas of the old-fashioned library, to the up-to-date information bureau. They will expect to find a literary atmosphere, a scholarly librarian, a ponderous printed catalog and books invisible, or at any rate inaccessible. Indeed they are vaguely disappointed to be greeted by anything else. No wonder that the sight of many tables crowded with earnest workers, who help themselves from open shelves and actually consult the impressive card index, should stagger them. The amazing part of it is that so many months pass before they can bring themselves to apply the object lesson. What joy, pray, can you find in the happy slogan, "Our business is answering questions," if borrowers will continue to apologetic in the removal of "silence" placards, if gize for asking them? What virtue is appar-stage-whispered inquiries still persist? What gain have you made in setting no

limit on the number of books lent, if borrowers uncomplainingly accept one volume as their quota?

As for the card catalog,—it is only the thoroughly acclimated and intrepid reader, whom you may *direct* to it. All others need to be coaxed. Printed directions for its use are posted, but they prove no substitute for personal reassurance. You must accompany readers to the cases to explain that the filing is by dictionary arrangement with authors, titles and subjects in one alphabet. You must pull out one of the neatly labeled drawers, find the required entry, copy the call number and produce the corresponding book. And then, having partially convinced them that the process is simple, you leave them to flounder helplessly among the cards and to discover that titles, identical with subject headings, are listed only under subject, that nondescript titles beginning *Principles*, *Elements*, *Text-book* are disregarded entirely, etc.

Nevertheless every library is convinced that the theory of self-help is correct even if the practice has its disadvantages. Yet, while a vigorous and persistent campaign is being waged to introduce the reader to the catalog, other library tools, almost as indispensable, are often shelved in some remote corner where the timid fear to trespass. To remedy this inconsistency the Newark Library has recently collected "Books in print," "Publisher's trade list annual," "Cumulative book review digest," together with the new "Standard dictionary" and placed them on a raised table convenient to the card catalog and supplementing it. Familiarity with books and index tools—the useful variety like city directories, street maps, railroad guides, etc.—is certainly the most effective antidote for literary prejudice and the librarian's halo.

Is it some perverted form of deference or distrust arising from ignorance, that is responsible for the public's reluctance to take us into their confidence when they have any definite information to secure? Are they too considerate to burden us with their personal problems? Or, does the importance of their own affairs advise against

the indiscretion of confidences? They know what they want, but are loath to give us the clue. If it is possible to obtain the desired information by any indirect scheme, so much the better. Should worse come to worse they may drop an inkling of what is wanted; but will never by any chance tell you why it is needed or precisely what it is. Adroit and tactful questionings are just as likely to prove disastrous as successful. The inquirer grows suspicious under cross-examination and will answer at random. Sometimes, if you are content to take him at his word and give him exactly what he asks for in spite of your better judgment and acquired intuition, he will make a pretense of examining the material submitted, while planning his next move; will then return to the desk, make a second request a little nearer the truth, and repeat his inquiry until eventually the secret is out. Which of us has not interviewed the mother who asks for books on travel, when what she really wants is a large picture of a polar bear; and the student who asks to be directed to the art books when she merely wishes Shakespeare's "Hamlet?" Occasionally it happens that the inquirer, encouraged by a sympathetic assistant, will throw discretion to the winds and suddenly decide to make a clean breast of the entire situation. Such impulses are rare. If the riddle remains unsolved, the library's efficiency is discredited. If the borrower departs with the "answer," it must be with an awakened assurance in his own ability to "play the game."

The irreverent are not so. They stoop to no such subtle subterfuges. They cherish no illusions regarding marble halls, literary atmosphere and a librarian's intellectual superiority. Books, catalogs, and index tools have no terrors for them, because they cheerfully decline to consider them. They prefer to get their information first-hand from the librarian. Why is she there, unless to make herself generally useful? If a shortage of time makes it advisable that they leave their list or question, or problem, the librarian can be depended on to look it up "at her leisure." They depart with a

promise to call again for the information. Perhaps a personal visit presents difficulties. In that case a messenger may be sent with very satisfactory results. For instance, a third grade child, dispatched by a teacher with a note, will return to school with a dozen pictures, selected from a collection of three hundred thousand, to illustrate the effect of climate and rainfall on human habitations! What matter that innumerable subject headings are consulted and hundreds of pictures handled in the search? The child is willing to wait and will overlook interruptions.

We have advertised that all questions will be answered. We are anxious to spread the news that the library is prepared to furnish information on electric bell, tariff, the fire-fighting apparatus in Kalamazoo, pill-box manufacturers in Pennsylvania, parliamentary law or scientific salesmanship. We are distressed that a great number of taxpayers know the library only as a place where you can consult a local directory, where you can read a San Francisco paper in New York or a New York paper in San Francisco, or where the children go to prepare school compositions. Each advertising venture brings an influx of new business and our claims are taxed to a point which is more than interesting. We have announced that all questions will be answered, and the questions are forthcoming. Memory-gem enthusiasts bethink themselves of forgotten favorites and present them for identification. They seat themselves at a table to await results and when, after a painstaking search for "When grandma danced the minuet," you report nothing closer than "When grandma danced the tango," it is a sorry reward to have the borrower smile blandly upon you and casually remark, "I'll ask the next time I'm at the Business Branch. They can always tell you what you want to know!" Likewise a skeptical patient will puzzle his amateur brain for hours over professional medical terms that he may confirm a physician's advice, and a prospective client will spend days among the law books to fortify himself against the

tricks of unscrupulous lawyers. When in doubt the desk assistant is called upon to settle fine points. The idea that a public institution is not justified in devoting an hour to some inconsequential query, or that it is not qualified to furnish professional aid, simply does not occur to them. The number of estranged families, reunited through the city directories service, cannot be estimated. Certainly some very absorbing family histories are poured into the desk assistant's ear, in spite of non-committal replies and discouraging silences. There is practically no end to these confidences. Borrowers like nothing better than to discuss books returned, weighing their opinions with the author's and expounding their own pet theories. The elderly retired gentleman is a problem. He spends most of his time at the library, cultivating ideas on a variety of subjects and rehearsing them to the desk assistant. He explains at length his elaborate plans to return the ten tribes to Canaan and invariably mistakes your attitude of polite attention for one of deep concern. Meanwhile a party of gay young friends may flounce in, sweep you and the rest of the equipment with an appraising glance, miss the other crowd, whom they have arranged to meet, sing out "nobody home" and whirl out again with an innocent indifference. All are oblivious to your distraction and to the business in hand.

Many of these offenders would doubtless prove agreeable and interesting under more favorable circumstances. They do not, however, constitute a satisfying public. Some of them are natural-born drones. The majority would rather impose on good nature than betray a strangeness in unfamiliar surroundings. In their eyes it is the lesser of two evils.

Those readers, who reassure us by intelligent appreciation, are obviously the most satisfying class. Appreciation is here meant to imply understanding and not gratitude. There is no more reason for a desk assistant to feel exalted because she is the humble means of cheering a convalescent with "Molly-Make-Believe," than

for an obliging clerk to experience a missionary zeal in the sale of a becoming gown. It is simply that to them the library has succeeded in imparting the spirit of good-will and unobtrusive helpfulness, for which it strives unceasingly. They recognize our aims, but respect our limitations. They ask for what they want with a business-like directness and avoid irrelevant personalities. They discriminate between legitimate requests and unreasonable demands. They question our inconsistencies and arbitrary rulings. They do not indulge in promiscuous praise. Neither do they withhold honest appreciation. In short, they are as near perfect as the public can well be.

In one form or another these qualities, good and bad, are met in every business and profession. They are not peculiar to patrons of libraries and the public is under such constant criticism that we can hardly expect them to be visibly affected over their failure to conform to our particular standards. Nevertheless, experience shows that many borrowers would be far more comfortable in the library were they better acquainted with its machinery. Others, whose unfamiliarity has deterred them from making a first visit, would undoubtedly be encouraged by more frequent and more casual reference to the library in print.

Here, then, is the strongest argument for library publicity, widespread and far-reaching; for a publicity which presupposes the generous support of local newspapers and educational agencies; for the type of publicity which prompted the "Saturday evening post," with a circulation of two million a week, to arrange for a two-page story about the Newark Library under the suggestive title of "Literature on the job"; for publicity which awards libraries a place side by side with public schools and public health in Zeublin's "American municipal progress"; and, finally, for publicity as spontaneous and delightful as Mary Antin's tribute in her "Promised land."

Mistaken notions and contemptuous indifference could not long survive a cam-

paign of print. Articles which depend for their interest on the facetious rehash of curious questions and ludicrous errors would soon lose caste. Not only that, but our advertising would then be absolutely honest. We would, for example, never intimate that information was invariably at hand, when in reality a diligent search is often necessary to unearth it. We would sacrifice to an even greater extent library hobbies to popular wants. We would somehow manage to buy books as they are needed. The complaint that books are "never in" is often more just than we are pleased to admit, and is one which we cannot afford to dismiss with a circulation-desk smile and a word of praise for the admirable reserve system.

After all, it is not with the born librarian a question of how the public appears across the circulation desk, but of how a library impresses its community.

CATHARINE VAN DYNE,
Newark Free Public Library.

IV.

The procession which files past the main desk in the library I am acquainted with raises three questions; where it comes from, what it contains, what it might contain.

It comes from a normal American city, located towards the setting sun from the line dividing the East and the West. We have had our moral survey and profited by it; we have had Billy Sunday and profited by him; our city is not dead to its opportunities for social service, and it has plenty of such opportunities. Among them is a large foreign population, but the census tells us that not more than one of each twenty-five of us who are more than ten years old are staying out of this procession because of illiteracy.

A study of the first thousand names in the registration book in the library I know about gives a composite picture of the borrower, seven-tenths Anglo-Saxon, more than one-tenth German by birth or descent, a little less than one-tenth Irish, and so on. I picture him as one who looks back for

the most part to Magna Charta and Plymouth Rock for his tastes, his prejudices, his views, and as one who owns a Ford and rents the upper flat to another family. He is all this in spite of the fact that a good deal less than half the population of the city is made up of native whites of native parentage, and in spite of the fact that the usual inducements have been made to reach the reader who is at home in Italian, Yiddish, Polish or Greek.

It is rhetorical license to refer to this composite borrower as "he." The borrower is in fact, mostly the other sort of thing. Out of every forty borrowers in the line I am describing twenty-three are women.

So far as we have gone then, in describing this procession at the main desk we are at liberty to frame an indictment against ourselves for not penetrating more deeply below the polished crust of what is genteel and well-to-do to make our institution a more positive social force in the community, and we are also at liberty to say to ourselves that we are not doing all we might to commend ourselves to the more practical and vigorous elements of the community. Too much Myrtle Reed, perhaps, you will say, and not enough O. Henry. Too much Chautauqua and not enough Ginger Talks on Salesmanship.

Of our duty to the readers in foreign languages we have been very frequently and forcibly reminded. I find a wealth of suggestions in the proceedings of this Association and in the contents of library periodicals. It has been an almost constant topic of discussion for the past ten years, led by such capable enthusiasts as John Foster Carr of the Immigrant Publication Society. Three years ago this Association listened to an inspiring talk by the author of "The promised land," who said that as for the five-foot shelf of classics the child of the immigrant swallows it whole and makes no bones of it. . . . "There," said I to myself, "I always knew that if I lived long enough I would one day hear of somebody who could read the Harvard Classics." And as I read that statement and considered the writings of Mil-

ton, of Mill, of Locke, of Hume and of Pasteur contained in Dr. Eliot's choice collection, and thought of what an examination I could pass in these standard authors, and then of the ingenuous immigrant child sitting there and swallowing them whole, I wondered what all the indignation was for which has been shown at the proposal of a literacy test in the immigration law. It is the librarian, the school teacher and the English professor, I said to myself, who should be forced to undergo a literacy test.

Mary Antin's exaggeration is the natural outgrowth of her inspiration and zeal. On the other side quite as interesting, is the indignant rejoinder of Miss Repplier to Miss Addams, Mary Antin and the rest, in that remarkable essay "The modest immigrant." She resents the idea that if we don't give ourselves up to the work of Americanizing the foreigner he will presently swallow us up alive. Well, if the aliens whom Edward Alsworth Ross describes as "backward men" are becoming a threatening danger to the Republic, which I doubt, probably it is the immigration officials and not the public libraries, that must be looked to first for protection. The reason for trying to increase the number of foreign born in this procession that files past the main desk should not be shame nor fear but love of the great calling of leading our fellow men to the living waters of good reading, and contributing joy to the lives of those who can be led to appreciate the splendid heritage of literature. For promoting the influence of literature is I assume still the chief business of our lives.

But what I miss chiefly in this procession is not the Russian, the Hungarian, the Pole, the Italian, or the male of any species, but the American farmer, the farmer's son, the farmer's daughter, the farmer's wife, and most particularly the last.

I miss these folks especially, because they are my own folks. I know them. I know what they are doing for America and what they deserve at her hands and what they need if they are to keep their indis-

pensable end up. Something, I think, remains to be done for them which has not been done, something that can't be done by the splendid organization of our departments of agriculture, our experiment stations, our summer courses, our soil surveys, our innumerable bulletins and our union schools. All these cannot give these people all they need of vital impulse and inner growth and gratify in them the appetite for joy. I say that the agency that can add joy to the life of the family on the back road, that can make the son of this family braver, purer and nobler, that can give to the daughter of this family companions among all the heroes and heroines of poetry and fiction, and that can lighten the burdens of the mother by taking her mind for a little time away from the deadening routine that so often weighs her down is a more valuable service even than the most recent information about lime, sulphur spray and incubator chicks.

Can it be possible, I ask myself, that the library in the city will be able indefinitely to remain deaf to the call from the American on the farm? Does the library which acknowledges so compelling an obligation to the immigrant in the city owe no obligation at all to the people on the farm whose children are drifting aimlessly to the city though the welfare of city and county alike demands that most of them should stay where they are and make country life better? Are the city limits a dead line at which the influence of the library, as a free institution, must halt forever? And on the other hand, is it out of the question to expect that county and town authorities in counties where large libraries exist may some day be awakened to the splendid advantage of free reading, and to a willingness to coöperate with the city in securing these advantages for country people?

Is there no hint for us, city and country, too, in the extension of rural free delivery routes over the whole United States and the consequent growth of the mail order business to the stupendous proportions that we see today? The most notable encour-

agement which this Association appears to have got on this subject is that contained in the stimulating address of Dr. Claxton two years ago who told you that every city library should at once be open to all the people of the country districts in the county where it is located and that some other provision should be made for the 2,000 counties with no library of more than 5,000 books.

Finally, if I were asked how I regard and describe the public as it files past the main desk in the Carnegie building in Syracuse, I should answer that I look on each individual as a worker of miracles for the glorifying of my duties. The boy in the young people's room who sat immovable and undisturbed, neither seeing nor hearing the explosion of the flash light that took his picture as a faithful reader, was then engaged with the *Tanglewood Tales*. He was engaged in bringing Nathaniel Hawthorne back to life. That is the miracle I mean. Hawthorne was there talking to that boy. The inmost, sweetest, strongest soul of the author, whether it be Moses or Homer or Stevenson or Shakespeare speaks to the appreciative reader wherever the book is read. Here is the Miracle of the Real Presence of the author actually taking place hundreds of times a day. The more frequently it happens the more completely is the library itself brought to life, and to bring it all to life we need the assistance of all kinds of readers. Towards the end of the Billy Sunday campaign in our town a fellow citizen whom I had never seen before, demanded an interview. Then he demanded a copy of the Holy Bible. Then he demanded that I turn to a certain verse. I didn't know where to find the verse, but I knew where the concordance was. I don't remember what the verse was, but it might well have been that bit of advice to the Galatians "be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The man's voice was thick. His gait was wobbly. His breath was strong. There is no reasonable doubt that he had left a friend somewhere in a saloon and that he wanted the Bible to decide a bet as to how

that verse read. So he took the book and zigzagged out of the building. Weeks afterwards I met him. He shook my hand for a long time. Then he told me who he was. He had changed. He had climbed on the wagon. "I'm on to stay," he remarked. "You should hear me at a trail hitter's meeting. My conversion dates from the day I came into the library." The man, you see, had brought St. Paul to life in that saloon in Syracuse. I want more and more people and more and more kinds of people to take part in this kind of mir-

acle. It can never be complete with any element of the reading public left out. It demands the help of the immigrant, the graduate student, the club woman, the shop girl with her splendid appetite for romance, the mechanic, the salesman, the farmer and the farmer's wife. I want to think of the farm house in Onondaga as a place where David Copperfield, Alan Breck, Beth, Joe and Amy are enjoying an immortality.

PAUL M. PAINE,
Syracuse Public Library.

TIMES PAST—TWENTY-FOUR A. L. A. CONFERENCES RECALLED *

By FREDERICK W. FAXON, *Former Secretary of A. L. A. and Chairman Travel Committee*

Listen my friends
And you shall hear,
Of the A. L. A. travels
From year to year.

Look closely good people,
That you may see
How the delegates journey
From sea to sea.

A wonderful opportunity to see our country under the most satisfactory auspices has been enjoyed by those who have regularly attended our annual meetings for the last twenty-four years. Aside from the interest in the papers and discussions, and the added inspiration and enthusiasm for our work gained, those yearly trips have broadened our knowledge of the world, have made us familiar with our country's scenic wonders, and introduced us to the beauties of many of the cities—their parks, art collections, and libraries.

At the request of our president, I am going to bring back to you some of the joys of our travels since I became a member of the A. L. A. in 1893, and attended the Chicago World's Fair meeting.

The fascination and beauty of that ex-

position will always remain with me—the myriads of lights at night reflected in the lagoons, the bands playing, the gondolas silently gliding by—it made an impression that will never fade,—a vision of some foreign country set down in the center of the United States. Since then we have attended five other world's fairs each beautiful in its way, but the first will to me remain the unique experience. Samuel Swett Green has given us in his book "The public library movement in the United States" an intimate history of this Association down to 1893, so it is appropriate that we should begin with that year, the fifteenth conference. Mr. Dewey was president, Dr. Hill secretary, and Mr. Carr treasurer. In 1893 was gathered the A. L. A. model library and the first "A. L. A. catalog" was compiled. The sessions at Chicago were spread over two weeks, thus allowing opportunity to study the exposition without missing meetings. They were held all over town,—at the Art Institute, in the old Newberry library, in the City Hall—where the Chicago Public Library was housed,—in several of the buildings of the University of Chicago. I believe the mileage we covered attending the 1893 sessions has remained a record to this day. A tally-ho ride from the North Side out to

*This paper was written to illustrate a series of lantern slides shown at the Asbury Park meeting, but was not read owing to lateness of the hour. Descriptions of slides are here omitted.